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The Path to Partnership: Revisiting the Five Key Elements of University-Community Partnership

Eric Gass, PhD

Introduction

In a previous edition of this journal (Gass, 2006), a new theoretical model of university-community partnerships was unveiled. Supporting the model were five key dimensions of partnership that were deemed necessary for a partnership to function. However, that article was strictly theoretical, based upon sets of partnership principles previously published in the literature, and not supported with empirical data.

This article revisits the theoretical model and the five key dimensions. Surveys have been collected and analyzed, and interviews have been conducted, with the goal being a deeper understanding of the partnership process, identification of dimensions that can be incorporated into social work curricula, and creation of a process that can be replicated to benefit the people and communities in which we live and work.

Specifically, this article will attempt to validate the prediction of the five key dimensions of university-community partnership discussed in the previous article (Gass, 2006). The relevant literature and content of the previous article will be reviewed, prior to discussion of the method and results of the current study. The results will then be linked to relevant curricular issues, as they relate to the continuing education of social workers.

Principles of University-Community Partnerships

There have been several attempts by different teams of researchers to define the characteristics of university-community partnerships (Holland, 2004; Israel, Schulz, Parker, and Becker, 1998; Lasker, Weiss, and Miller, 2001; Roussos and Fawcett, 2000; Seifer and Maurana, 2000). Each of the five sets was reviewed in detail in the previous article (Gass, 2006). These five models reflect comprehensive attempts to define the concepts of partnerships. However, one thing missing from the models is consistency. While there is generally some overlap, not all of the models include the same concepts across the board. Thus, the flow and linkages between dimensions of a university-community partnership differ depending on the model. In the next section, a new model of core partnership dimensions will be reviewed. The model is not an attempt to create a new list of partnership dimensions. Instead, the model will be presented as a flowchart, focusing on integration and highlighting the linkages between dimensions.

Model of University-Community Partnership

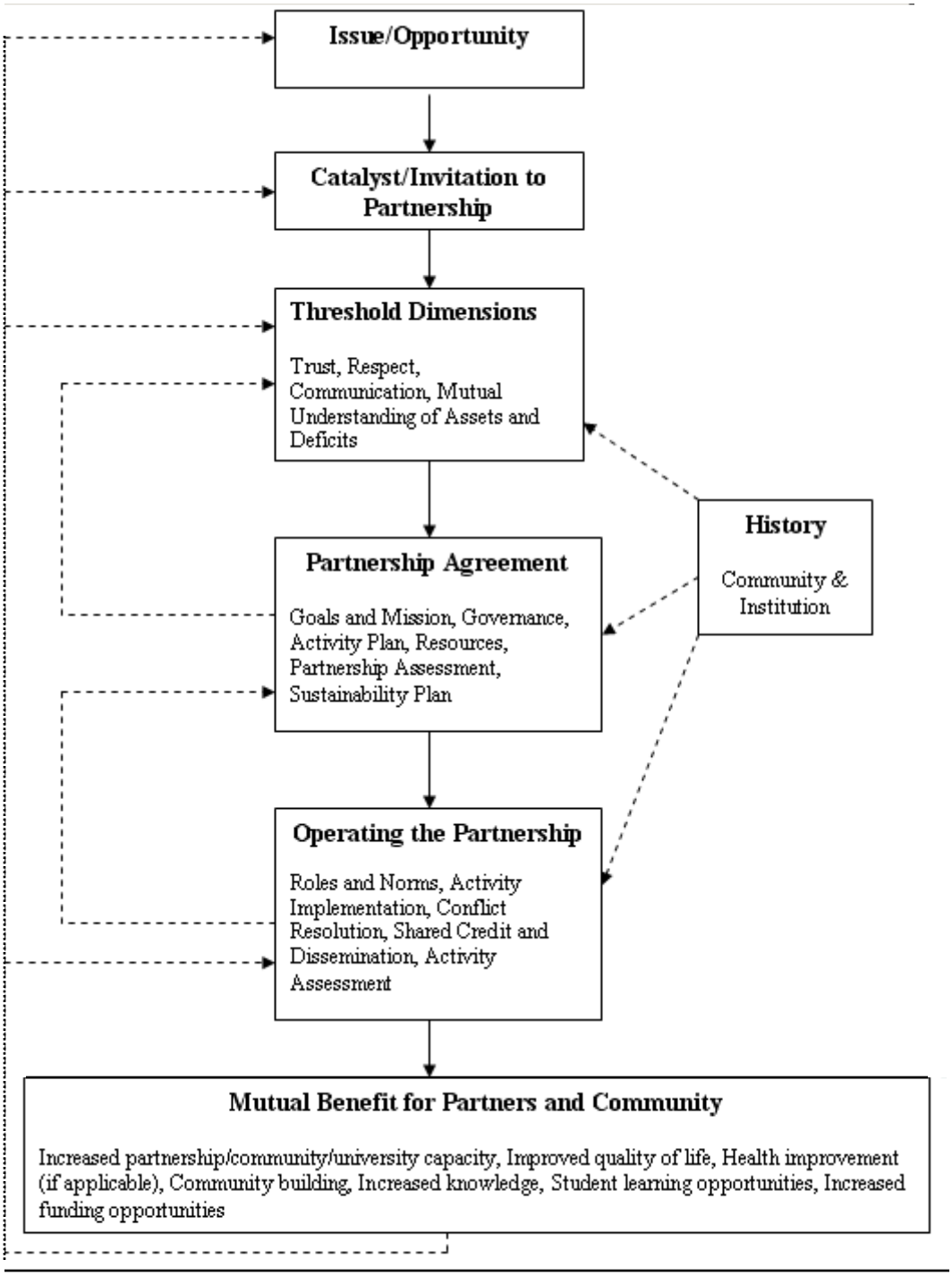
Figure 1 presents the proposed model of university-community partnership. The model integrates the five sets of principles discussed in the previous section and creates linkages between them, producing a process through which partnerships develop, encounter, and potentially resolve issues at different stages. It is proposed that in order to be successful, partnerships will address the dimensions in the order outlined, before moving on to the next stage. Thus, there is a hierarchy to the process. For example, it is proposed that partnerships revolve around some issue in the community. The issue can be health-related, such as diabetes prevention, school and education-focused crime prevention, the training of college students, or anything that both partners can agree upon. That being said, the community issue should be important and relevant to all partners.

Secondly, this model posits an explanation or catalyst that leads to the formation of the partnership. In some cases, a university or community agency decides that in order to best address the issue in the environment, having a partner would increase the chances of success. The key point about the catalyst is that partnerships do not occur in a vacuum. Some person or organization must express a desire to partner with other people or organizations that have the ability to address an issue.

At this point, the partners are in the process of getting to know one another and beginning to determine if the partnership has what it takes to take action on the issue. The partners then address the threshold dimensions: trust, respect,

Eric Gass, PhD is an Assistant Professor of Family and Community Medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Figure 1: The Path to University-Community Partnership



communication, and mutual understanding of assets and deficits.

Impacting the threshold dimensions are the histories of both the university and community with regard to partnership. Previous experiences of community-based activities, not only from the university or community organization, but also by residents of the community, can impact the amount of trust and respect the organizations have for each other. These potential fears can be addressed through communication. Communication surrounding the assets and deficits of each partner, and the community as a whole, take place early in the process. It is possible that some potential partners may choose not to participate at this point, if it is determined that the organizations are not a good match.

The threshold dimensions are not tangible constructs. A decision is not made to communicate or to trust a partner. These are processes that are inherent in any relationship. Trust and respect can increase through the actions of other partners or through communication. Communication is not negotiated or planned like an evaluation or a budget. What a partner says and how they say it impacts the partnership. Through honest communication, partners learn about one another, come to better understand their own organization, and make the decision to move forward.

The next step for the partnership is to come to an agreement, either a written document or a verbal commitment, based upon trust and mutual understanding (Seifer and Maurana, 2000). This is the formalization of the partnership, and the tangible evidence of the next major step in the partnership, which will be implementation. The partnership agreement is jointly developed through negotiation of the goals and mission of the partnership, creation of a governance structure, community-based activities, a partnership assessment plan, and a plan for sustaining the partnership, if desired. After the negotiations are completed, and the participating organizations agree to form a partnership, the operation of the partnership can get underway.

The operation dimensions of a partnership differ from the threshold dimensions in that operation dimensions can be addressed at different times, and they differ in importance relevant to partnership success. For example, it may be ideal to have a dissemination plan in place at the time a partnership agreement is developed, yet a partnership will not fail if it is not included. As the partnership moves forward, a dissemination plan may emerge, especially if years have passed since the partnership's inception. However, not having clear goals in the partnership agreement may prevent a partnership from succeeding.

Several partnership models in the literature speak of outcomes that mutually benefit all of the partners (Israel et al., 1998; Holland, 2004). However, there seems to be multiple levels of benefit -- those benefits experienced by the partners and benefits for the residents of community. One key outcome for the partnership itself, as an independent entity, is the understanding that the partners learn from each other. The community understands how to work with academics, while the university gains insight into the daily activities of community-based organizations and citizens.

The benefits to the community itself, outside of the partnership, are twofold. First, if the partnership is successful in achieving the agreed-upon goals, the residents of the community should have an improved quality of life, or, in the case of health partnerships, improved health or access to healthcare. Second, community building occurs. By working with and learning from the university partner, community organizations can increase their capacity to provide program, conduct assessments and evaluations, and work with stakeholders to continue growing.

The university gains increased knowledge about the process of working with the community. Every chance a university has to interact outside of the ivory tower increases the chances of success in future partnerships through experience. These partnerships also provide the university an opportunity to prepare students to work in the community in which they are currently studying. Finally, partnerships can benefit the

university through increasing funding opportunities, higher visibility, higher enrollment, and higher status in the community (Holland, 2004).

Enveloping this entire process is a feedback loop that impacts every level of the partnership. Israel et al. (1998) states that partnerships are cyclical and iterative. This statement is appropriate considering the different levels that outcomes can impact. Information derived from outcomes can determine if an issue in the community is resolved, or at least improved. Also, outcomes may show that the issue is still present, but can serve as a catalyst toward changes in the partnership. Threshold dimensions can be affected by partnership outcomes, especially if deficits are eliminated, or trust increases after successful completion of a project. Finally, partnership-assessment outcomes can be developed and disseminated as best practices. The lessons learned can be applied to address a new issue in the community and to improve the functioning of other university-community partnerships. In sum, partnerships are dynamic, with communication and feedback impacting the partnership at multiple levels within the hierarchy of the model.

Five Essential Partnership Dimensions

In addition to proposing the partnership model, the previous article (Gass, 2006) outlined the essential minimum dimensions needed to create a university-community partnership. Based upon the literature, the following five dimensions were selected:

1. ***Trust/Respect.*** It is essential that the university trust their community partners and treats them as equals in the partnership.

2. ***Communication.*** A consistent flow of information between the organizations on all aspects of the operation will benefit the partnership.

3. ***Governance.*** One of the most mentioned sources of success or failure of university- community partnerships is governance (Mitchell and Shortell, 2000; Levy, Baldyga, and Jurkowski, 2003). Universities tend to function slowly, with committee meetings, multiple levels of authority, and political interests involved in the process. Community organizations tend to be less hierarchical, more informal, and responsive to the needs of their constituents. Thus, the merging of the two organizational styles is critical in determining how the partnership will be managed as it goes forward.

4. ***Assessment.*** Assessment can take two forms: An assessment to measure impact of community interventions or programs and an assessment of partnership functioning.
Governance and assessment are two areas where community professionals, such as social workers, non-profit executives, and teachers of community leaders, can focus their attention in terms of contributions to partnerships. The literature shows that partnership funding is often skewed to the university partner (Wolff and Maurana, 2001). Thus, community practitioners, and those that educate and train them, could incorporate the following topics into college degree programs or continuing education programs: *A) Leadership.* Developing the skills and tools necessary to justify serving as a principal investigator on grants. *B) Finances*. Train small non-profit agencies and social work students in detailed accounting practices. *C) Analytical Skill.* Learning advanced statistics and software, such as SPSS, that can be utilized to produce assessment results and outcome studies. Anecdotally, one of the main university contributions to a partnership is research skill. *D) Providing Organizational Services.* Train community workers and students in quality-control and internal-assessment techniques, which frees up administrative resources to be allocated elsewhere.

5. ***Dissemination.*** The final key element necessary for a successful, sustainable partnership is a dissemination plan. Dissemination is a direct derivative from the assessment of the partnership in that it informs key stakeholders of the progress of the partnership.

Methods

Participants

A total of 23 partnerships were awarded grants by a statewide community health foundation in

2004, the first year of awards for this program. Per grant rules, partnerships were to take place within one Midwestern state, and include at least one faculty member from a medical school and one community-based partner. In terms of partnership participants, there were 28 faculty members, with seven of the 28 participating in two partnerships. The seven faculty listed in multiple partnerships were asked to complete a survey for each partnership in which they were involved, bringing the number of potential faculty responses to 35.

For the community partners, a total of 87 people participated in funded partnerships. Three of 87 participated in two partnerships. The three community partners listed in multiple partnerships were asked to complete a survey for each project in which they participated, brining the maximum number of completed surveys to 90.

Survey Data Collection

A 29-question survey was developed as a quantitative tool to assess the extent to which the participant perceives that the dimensions of partnership are present in their current collaboration. The dimensions to be assessed are as follows: trust and respect, communication, mutual understanding of assets and deficits, goals and mission, governance, resources, partnership assessment, sustainability plan, roles and norms, conflict resolution, shared credit and dissemination, and activity assessment (Table 1).

The questions assessing the presence of partnership dimensions were written in either a dichotomous yes-no format or Likert scale format. The Likert scale questions are either a 4-point or 3-point scale, depending upon the wording of the question and the appropriateness in regard to the number of choices available.

Proxies for partnership outcomes needed to be operationalized to allow for an analysis of the model. The partnership-outcome variables are current partnership functioning, achievement of goals and objectives, organizational benefits to partnership participation, and future sustainability of partnership. These outcome variables were selected due to their ability to cover the gamut of outcomes associated with good functioning partnerships. Responses to these questions were assessed on a 10-point scale.

A total of 125 surveys was mailed to faculty and community partners in early March 2006. Contained in the packet along with the surveys was an introduction letter, an informed-consent letter, a signature form, and a postage-paid envelope. Participants were asked to sign the consent form, complete the survey, and return it in the postage-paid envelope to the author. Participants were given approximately three weeks to complete the survey.

The first survey mailing yielded a total of 36 completed surveys, 26 from community partners and 10 from faculty partners. Another mailing was sent out during the final week of March 2006. The second round of data collection produced 22 completed surveys, 12 from community partners and another 10 from faculty partners.

For the third and final attempt to recruit participants, a reminder e-mail was sent to all non-responders during the final week of April 2006. The third round of recruitment produced seven completed surveys, four from community partners and three from faculty partners. The total number of completed surveys was n=65, producing an overall response rate of 52%. Community partners completed 42 surveys, which accounted for 47% of the community population, while faculty partners completed 23 surveys, which accounted for 66% of the faculty population.

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Interviews

An interview guide was developed and utilized to obtain more in-depth information concerning the partnerships of this study. While the quantitative survey provided an overview of the partnerships, the interview data provided detailed examples of the development, management, and implementation of the partnerships, in the participant's own words. Also, the survey results showed that some partners reported scores on the high end of

Table 1: Links between Survey Items and Relevant Literature

Variable Name: *Survey Item* [Theoretical Concept]

Trust and Respect

Valued Contributions: *1. How much do the other partners appreciate and value the contributions you and your organization make to the partnership?* [Acknowledgement of other's skill (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000)]

Communication

Documentation: *2. To what extent is the work of the partnership formally documented in meeting minutes, notes, and agendas?* [Documenting clearly the issues and plans of the partnership (Cheadle et al., 1997; Cox, 2000)]

Outside Communication: *3. How often does the partnership have regular meetings with non-partners such as constituents, stakeholders and clients?* [Report to key stakeholders outside of the partnership (Lasker et al., 2001)]

Common Language: *4. How often is information shared among partners in a way that is accessible and understandable to all partners?* [Sharing knowledge in an accessible environment, creating a common language (Seifer and Maurana, 2000)]

Mutual Understanding of Assets and Deficits

Community Needs Awareness: *5. As a result of working in the partnership, have you become more aware of the needs of the people your partnership serves?* [Realistic perception of community needs (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993)]

Community Asset Awareness *6. As a result of working in the partnership, have you become more aware of the assets/strengths of the people your partnership serves?* [Realistic understanding of community assets (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993)]

Partner Assessment *7. To what extent did the partners assess each other's capabilities when planning the activities outlined in the grant proposal?* [Mutual understanding and initial consideration of assets (Levy et al., 2003; Thompson, Story, and Butler, 2003)]

Self Assessment *8. As a result of participating in the partnership, to what extent has your understanding of your own organizations' strengths and weaknesses been enhanced?* [Deficits uncovered through identification of assets (Maurana, Beck, and Newton, 1998)]

Understanding Partner Capacity 9. To what extent has participating in the partnership affected your understanding of other partner organization strengths and weaknesses? [Deficits uncovered through identification of assets (Maurana et al., 1998)]

Goals and Mission

Mission Clarity : *10. How clear are the mission and priorities of your partnership?* [Clear goals and mission are key to success (Wolff and Maurana, 2001)]

Mission Alignment: *11. How much do the mission and priorities of your organization align with those of the partnership?* [Achievement of goals will provide benefit to both community and organization (Cauley, 2000).]

Governance

Partnership Rules *12. Do the partners have mutually understood rules for making decisions?* [Not an incorporated entity, governance based upon mutual benefit, trust, and reciprocity (Weiner and Alexander, 1998)]

Partnership Influence: *13. How much influence does your organization have in partnership decision-making?* [Shared leadership (Bernal, Shellman, and Reid, 2004)]

Resources

Budget Participation: *14. How much opportunity did you and your organization have to participate in developing the partnership budget?* [Fair allocation of resources, university dominated budget process (Wolff and Maurana, 2001)]

Budget Understanding: *15. To what extent did you and your organization understand the budget resources available to you through the partnership, at the time the proposal was submitted?* [Communication, fair allocation of resources (Wolff and Maurana, 2001)]

Table 1: Links between Survey Items and Relevant Literature (cont).

Resources (cont.)

Partnership Sufficiency: *16. In terms of the overall partnership, how sufficient are the grant resources awarded to the partnership with regard to achieving the goals and mission outlined in the proposal?* [Increased funding is related to greater partnership effectiveness (Mitchell and Shortell, 2000).]

Organizational Sufficiency: *17. How sufficient are the resources your organization has received to implement the activities assigned to you in the partnership?* [Increased funding is related to greater partnership effectiveness (Mitchell and Shortell, 2000).]

Partnership Assessment

Partnership Assessment: *18. To what extent does the partnership regularly review its activities against the goals and mission of the partnership?* [Partnership assessment is challenging and can take many forms (El Ansari, Phillip, and Hammick, 2001).This question measures if the partnership is taking action in this area.]

Not included in partnership model: *19. Has your partnership brought on any new partners? If yes, who are they and what are they contributing?* [No longer applicable to analysis]

Sustainability Plan

Sustainability Plan: *20. Has the partnership made plans to sustain the program beyond the period of this grant?* [Not all partnerships are meant to be sustainable (Bringle and Hatcher, 2002).This question will assess this concept.]

Roles and Norms

Culture Change: *21. How much has the culture of your organization changed as a result of participating in the partnership?* [Each organization in the partnership has a unique culture (Huppert, 2000).This question will assess if that culture been influenced by the partnership.]

Cultural Understanding: *22. As a result of working in the partnership, how well do you think the other partner[s] understand the culture of your organization?* [Not learning and understanding other's organizational culture can be detrimental to the partnership (Bernal et al., 2004).]

Conflict Resolution

Conflict: *23. How many significant disagreements have arisen in the operation of the partnership?* [Power differential, distribution of funds, organizational culture, and lack of trust are sources of conflict in partnerships (Wolff and Maurana, 2001; Lasker et al., 2001; Weiner and Alexander, 1998).]

Conflict Resolution: *24. When the partnership has encountered a significant disagreement, to what extent have the partners been able to achieve a mutually agreeable resolution?* [Conflicts are more easily resolved if trust is high in the partnership (Weiner and Alexander, 1998).]

Shared Credit and Dissemination

Dissemination: *25. How often does the partnership share information on progress and/or outcomes with the wider community?* [Self-promotion is encouraged. Celebrate progress and accomplishments with community members (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000).]

Shared Credit: 26. To what extent do all partners share credit for the accomplishments of the partnership?Sharing the story of the partnership is both the responsibility of the university and community partners (Seifer and Maurana, 2000).

Activity Assessment

Outcome Match: *27. Does this partnership have outcome indicators related to the activities described in the grant proposal?* [The measurements of success match the goals and objectives of the grant to prove effectiveness (El Ansari, et al., 2001).]

Outcome Development: *28. Were all of the partners involved in the development of outcome indicators and measures?* [Communication, balance of power, to ensure relevant measures for each partner are incorporated.]

the Likert scale, especially on the four partnership-outcome questions. However, there was variability among the responses, and thus, the interview provided the participant an opportunity to explain specifically what went right and what went wrong in the partnership.

The questions were not structured to follow the proposed partnership model, nor did they include all of the partnership dimensions outlined in the model. Instead, the questions were open to interpretation by the participants and could include information on any topic of their choosing. By not framing all of the questions according to the model, the interview allowed the participant to select salient points, identify what was important to their partnership, what went well, and what, if any, conflicts arose.

Twenty potential participants were selected for interviews, 10 faculty partners and 10 community partners. The interview participants were selected based upon their responses to the partnership-outcomes questions. For both subject pools, three of the potential interview participants had scores ranging between nine and 10 on the 10-point questions, four more participants with scores around the middle of the scale were selected, and three participants with scores of four or lower on the 10-point scale, which indicated negative perceptions about the partnership, were invited to participate. This selection process, though not random, provided a balance of opinions and insight into the functioning of a partnership and provided evidence as to why certain partnerships work while others do not.

Participants were not identified by name, which was linked to a code number on their completed survey, until after the 20 participants were selected. Seven faculty partners and nine community partners agreed to be interviewed, for a total of 16 interviews. The interviews were scheduled for 90 minutes and were saved on a digital voice recorder and transcribed.

The transcriptions were then reviewed, question-by-question, with common themes across interviews identified. The criteria for the analysis of the interview data were the dimensions of the proposed partnership model.

Variable Recoding -Compensating for Skewness

The first step in the data analysis was to examine how, and in which direction, the distributions for each variable on the survey were skewed. To do so, a descriptive statistics analyses was performed, with the skewness and standard error of skewness selected as outcomes. A rule of thumb in determining if data are skewed is to compare the absolute values of skewness with two times the standard error of skewness (Brown, 1997). If absolute skewness is greater than two-times the standard error of skewness, the distribution is significantly skewed. Question 20 on the survey was not included in any analyses. After reviewing the literature and the theory behind the partnership model, assessing the inclusion of new partners was not relevant to this study. This leaves a potential of 32 variables eligible for inclusion in analyses. Of those 32 variables, 25 have a significant skew. Also, of the 32 variables, 30 are shown to have a negative skew, indicating that the majority of the responses are clustered on the high end of the ordinal scale, that is for "yes" for the yes/no questions. The only two variables that have a positive skew are the questions assessing conflict resolution. This is expected since the lower levels of the Likert scale indicate lower levels of conflict.

Due to the skewness found in the data, and the fact that all of the variables were written at the ordinal level, it was determined that recoding the data would allow the variables to be utilized in the appropriate type of analysis. Therefore, the 28 remaining partnership-dimension variables were recoded into "1-0" binomial variables.

Theoretically relevant variables were assessed for multicolinearity using the Spearman's Rho correlation statistic. A rule of thumb when assessing multicolinearity is that a correlation of .90 or greater, or several correlations of .70 or greater, show that the independent variables are collinear (Garson, 2006). None of the correlations among the dichotomous variables achieved the level of multicolinearity; however, statisti-

cally significant correlations among theoretically relevant variables were used as evidence to create aggregate variables, in an effort to reduce the number of variables in the regression equations. Table 2 shows the original variables, the Spearman's Rho correlation results, and the name of the aggregate variable. A detailed description of the variable recoding process can be obtained by contacting the author.

Table 2: Multicolinearity Results

Survey Items	Spearman's Rho	New Variable
Threshold Dimensions		
Perception of Trust Valued Contributions	.61***	Trust and Respect
Community Needs Awareness Community Asset Awareness	.53***	Community Awareness
Self Assessment Understanding Partner Capacity	.22*	Understanding Capacity
Partnership Agreement Dimensions		
Mission Clarity Mission Alignment	.26**	Partnership Mission
Budget Participation Budget Understanding	.39**	Budget Process
Partnership Sufficiency Organizational Sufficiency	.39***	Funding Sufficiency
Operating the Partnership Dimensions		
Culture Change Cultural Understanding	.27**	Organizational Culture
Conflict Conflict Resolution	N/A	Conflict Resolution
Outcome Match Outcome Development	.39**	Activity Assessment

*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Regression Analyses

A series of regressions were performed to test the relationships between the threshold dimensions and partnership-agreement dimensions, as proposed in the partnership model. In the first series of logistic regressions, the variables representing the threshold dimensions were individually regressed upon each of the variables associated with the partnership agreement dimensions to assess the unique variance for each independent variable. In the partnership model, it is proposed that the threshold dimensions of trust, respect, communication, and mutual understanding of assets and deficits are to be addressed before the participating university and community organizations can proceed to formally commit to partnership. Goals and mission, governance, resources, partnership assessment, and sustainability plan represent the partnership agreement dimensions. Thus, the purpose of these analyses is to investigate how much the threshold dimensions actually contribute to the achievement of the partnership agreement dimensions.

The second set of logistic regressions, utilizing the methodology described above, regressed the partnership agreement dimensions of goals and mission, governance, resources, partnership assessment, and sustainability plan upon the variables representing the operating the partnership dimensions of roles and norms, conflict resolution, shared credit and dissemination, and activity assessment. These regressions test the theory from the partnership model that after organizations agree to work together and formalize the partnership, they will go through a process of understanding each other's norms, address conflict in the partnership, jointly disseminate findings to stakeholders, and assess the programmatic aspects of the partnership.

The third and final set of regressions, in this case multiple regression, followed the methodology described above and regressed the operating partnership variables of goals and mission, governance, resources, partnership assessment, and sustainability plan upon the partnership outcome variables of current partnership functioning, overall achievement of goals and objectives, organization benefits to partnership participation, and future sustainability. These results will test the concept that once partnerships are operational and

working together, participants will have a sense of how the partnership is functioning, if the partnership is on track to achieve the goals outlined in the grant proposal, if there are tangible benefits to the partnership, and if the partnership is likely to continue past the conclusion of the grant.

For this research project, p<.10 was labeled statistically significant. The maximum sample size for community partners is 42, and for faculty the maximum sample size is 23. Considering the lack of statistical power between these two samples, achieving the standard significance level needed to reject the null hypothesis of p<.05 will be difficult. Thus, the use of p<.10 will allow for the discussion of findings that may be substantial when looking at odds ratios or beta scores in a regression analysis, but lack the statistical power to show statistically significant results.

Results

The results show that the partnership dimensions of Trust and Respect, Communication, Governance, and Assessment play an important role in the operation of university-community partnerships, as predicted previously (Gass, 2006). However, the findings involving the dimension of Dissemination are not as robust as the results for two other variables, Partnership Mission and Organizational Culture. Thus, based upon the data analysis, it is now proposed that the following five partnership dimensions are essential to partnership success: Threshold Dimensions (Trust and Respect, Communication, Mutual Understanding of Assets and Deficits), Governance, Assessment, Partnership Mission, and Organizational Culture. Brief descriptions of the key statistical findings for these variables are discussed below. Detailed information on the survey questions is located in Table 1. Table 6 provides a narrative summary of key regression results.

Threshold Dimensions

Table 3 shows that independently, Trust and Respect (Exp(B)=5.61, p<.05), Common Language (Exp(B)=3.49, p<.10) and Community Awareness (Exp(B)=8.87, p<.05) contribute statistically significant variance to the dependent Partnership- Mission variable.

Two dependent variables assessed the partnership dimensions of Governance, and Trust and Respect (Exp(B)=9.78, p<.01). Outside Communication (Exp(B)=8.70, p<.01), Common Language (Exp(B)=9.78, p<.01), and Partner Assessment (Exp(B)=3.93, p<.10) contribute significant variance to the dependent variable of Partnership Rules.Partner Assessment (Exp(B)=2.91, p<.10) had a statistically significant relationship with Partnership Influence.

In addition, Understanding Capacity (Exp(B)

Table 3: Threshold Dimension Variables (rows) Regressed upon Partnership Agreement Variables (columns)

	Partnership Mission	Partnership Rules	Partnership Influence	Budget Process	Partnership Assessment
	Unique Variance	Unique Variance	Unique Variance	Unique Variance	Unique Variance
	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)
Trust and Respect n=64	5.61**	9.78***	2.37	0.87	4.76**
Communication					
Outside Communication n=63	1.21	8.70***	0.47	0.74	3.57**
Common Language n=64	3.49*	9.78***	2.37	3.80	11.92***
Mutual Understanding of Assets and Deficits					
Community Awareness n=64	8.87**	2.45	0.86	1.58	3.61
Partner Assessment n=62	2.10	3.93*	2.91*	1.00	2.40
Understanding Capacity n=64	1.73	0.79	2.10	2.64*	0.82

*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01

=2.64, p<.10) had a statistically significant relationship with Budget Process, while Trust and Respect (Exp(B)=4.76, p<.05), Outside Communication (Exp(B)=3.57, p<.05), and Common Language (Exp(B)=11.92, p<.01) had statistically significant relationships with Partnership Assessment.

The key finding for the Threshold Dimensions is that all of the variables had a statistically significant relationship with at least one dependent variable. This supports the idea that Trust and Respect, Communication, and Mutual Understanding of Assets and Deficits serves as the foundation for the partnership, with these dimensions forming the basis for the development of goals and mission, governance structure, budgets, and assessments.

Governance

Governance of the partnership plays an important role with respect to the perceptions of organizational culture and conflict resolution. Table 4 shows that Partnership Rules (Exp(B)=3.20, p<.10) had a statistically significant relationship with Conflict Resolution, such that partnerships that have established clear rules for decision-making are over three times as likely to report no conflict in the partnership as partnerships that do not have decision-making rules.

Partnership Mission

When each independent variable is regressed individually upon the dependent variables of Organizational Culture and Activity Assessment, only one, Partnership Mission, is statistically significant. Thus, it can be concluded from this finding that partnerships that have clear goals and missions are more likely to perceive that the culture of their organization has changed as a result of participating in the partnership, that partners understand the culture of their specific organization, and are more likely to have valid outcome indicators related to partnership activities.

Activity Assessment

In the third and final set of analyses, variables representing the partnership dimensions were regressed upon the four partnership-outcome variables (Table 5). For these analyses, multiple regression was used. The use of multiple regression is justified because the dependent variables are 10-point scales. When ordinal variables have a scale of six or greater, they can be treated as interval variables in a regression model. All of the independent variables are dichotomous.

The first dependent variable is current-partnership functioning. When each of the independent variables was regressed individually on the dependent variable, two provided statistically significant results, Shared Credit (B=0.90, p<.10) and Activity Assessment (B=1.36, p<.01).

The next dependent variable is overall achievement of goals and objectives, which assessed partners' perceptions as to how successful the partnership has been in achieving the goals and objectives outlined in their grant proposal. Again, Shared Credit (B=1.58, p<.01), and Activity Assessment (B=0.92, p<.05) provided statisti-

Table 4: Partnership Agreement Variables (rows) Regressed upon Oper-

	Organizational Culture	Conflict Resolution	Activity Assessment
	Unique Variance	Unique Variance	Unique Variance
	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)
Goals and Mission			
Partnership Mission n=62	5.73**	1.81	2.55*
Governance			
Partnership Rules n=62	0.51	3.20*	1.81
Partnership Influence n=62	1.20	0.69	2.33
Resources			
Budget Process n=61	0.55	1.10	0.44
Funding Sufficiency n=61	1.49	1.23	0.78
Partnership Assessment n=63	2.04	1.77	2.24
Sustainability Plan n=62	1.67	1.30	2.00

*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Table 5: Operating the Partnership Variables (rows) Regressed upon Partnership Outcome Variables (columns)

	Current Partnership Functioning	Overall Achievement of Goals and Objectives	Benefits to Partnership Participation
Shared Credit and Dissemination	**Unique Variance B**	**Unique Variance B**	**Unique Variance B**
Dissemination n=59	0.72	0.66	1.27*
Shared Credit n=61	0.90*	1.58***	-0.19
Activity Assessment n=61	1.36***	0.92**	1.38**

*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01

cally significant results.

The third dependent variable is organizational benefits to partnership participation, which assessed partners' perceptions as to how many benefits the partnership will bring to their specific organization. When each of the independent variables was regressed individually on the dependent variable, Dissemination (B=1.27, p<.10), and Activity Assessment (B=1.38, p<.05) provided statistically significant results.

Based up the results of these analyses, the key variable in predicting effective partnership functioning and achievement of goals is Activity Assessment, which translates to having valid outcome measures that were developed by the partnership as a whole, while sharing the credit for partnership success with others.

Organizational Culture

What is interesting about the findings related to Organizational Culture is that, as an independent variable in the regression analyses, it did not significantly predict any of the partnership outcome variables. This may be due to the variable's placement in the model, meaning understanding partner culture and changes in your own organization's culture are not responsible for successful partnership outcomes.

However, this does not mean that the culture of participating organizations did not play a role in impacting these partnerships. Specifically, having clear partnership goals, and understanding how those goals relate to the goals and mission of your own organization lead to a greater understanding of organizational culture, as shown in Table 4. The quantitative results do not fully explain the details associated with organizational culture. The interview data provided specific aspects of organizational culture and how it relates to other dimensions in the partnership model.

The interview data shows that many faculty partners feel the IRB did not adjust to accommodate the fluidity, or history, of community-based projects. For example, one community partner experienced a four-month delay in implementing a telephone survey because the IRB requested significant justification for the addition of two questions to the survey. The community partner had implemented this survey for years, and added two questions at the request of the faculty partner. The IRB was made aware of this history, but still required a completely amended protocol before the new questions could be implemented and responses documented. Another example was a violation of protocol warning because a faculty partner completed a survey via telephone instead of in person. Even though there was a 300-mile distance between the faculty member and the survey respondents, the institutional IRB required that a violation of protocol and a new amendment be submitted when the faculty partner indicated on an IRB progress report that not all interviews could be completed in person.

Many interviewees stated that community partners had not heard of the IRB nor did they understand why the activities that they were to carry out needed to be reviewed by this committee. Both faculty and community partners indicated that documenting informed consent was

seen as a barrier to implementing programs in the community. Potential subjects were not comfortable signing documents from an institution that they had little familiarity with.

In addition to the IRB, several other issues related to organizational culture appeared in the interview data. Both community and academic staff associated with the collaborations indicated

Table 6: Relationships Between Five Key Partnership Dimensions and Dependent Variables*

Independent Variables: Threshold Dimensions	**Dependent Variables:** Partnership Agreement Dimensions
Partnerships with high levels of trust and respect lead to…	…the development of clear goals and mission for the partnership that align with the goals and mission of partner organizations, the development of clear rules for partnership decision making, and the development of a partnership progress assessment.
Partners that communicate with stakeholders and constituents from outside the partnership will lead to…	…the development of clear rules for partnership decision-making, the perception of having an influence in partnership decision-making, and engage in a regular partnership progress assessment.
Partners that communicate with each other in an accessible and understandable manner will lead to…	…the development of clear goals and mission for the partnership that align with the goals and mission of partner organizations, the development of clear rules for partnership decision- making, a budget development process that includes, and is understood, by all partners, and the mutual development of a partnership progress assessment.
Partners that are aware of the needs and assets of the target population in the community will lead to…	…the development of clear goals and mission for the partnership that align with the goals and mission of partner organizations.
Partners that assess each other's strengths and weaknesses when planning the activities of the partnership will lead to…	…the development of clear rules for partnership decision-making, the perception of having an influence in partnership decision-making.
Partners that have gained an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their organization, and the strengths and weaknesses of their partners, through participating in the partnership will lead to…	… the perception of having an influence in partnership decision-making, and a budget development process that includes, and is understood, by all partners.
Independent Variables: Partnership Mission and Governance	**Dependent Variables**: Operating the Partnership Dimensions
Partnerships that develop clear goals and mission that align with the goals and mission of partner organizations will lead to…	…changes and understanding in the organizational cultures of the partner, and the mutual development of valid activity assessment tools.
Partnerships that develop clear rules for decision-making will lead to…	…changes and understanding in the organizational cultures of the partner, and prevent conflict among the partners.
Independent Variable: Activity Assessment	**Dependent Variables**: Partnership Outcome Variables
Partners that mutually development valid activity assessment tools will lead to…	…the perception that the partnership is functioning in a highly effective manner, the perception that the partnership is highly successful in achieving its goals and objectives, and the perception that participating in the partnership will bring many benefits to the participating organizations.

* The fifth key variable, Organizational Culture, is a dependent variable in this analysis summary and is part of the Operating the Partnership Dimensions.

that faculty delegated much of the implementation of the partnership to others. In these cases, faculty were primarily used to assist in navigating university politics, or to intervene in difficult situations. While this was not seen as a positive or negative, several interview participants stated that the faculty helped to write the grant, and then disengaged from partnership implementation.

Several faculty partners indicated that they felt it w as their duty to bridge the cultural gaps between the medical school and the community partners by preparing them for the IRB and budget work required by the institution. In order to do that, the faculty partner should have some awareness of the culture, the strengths, and the weaknesses of the community partners in order to predict what difficulties may arise. Some of the more troubled partnerships, based upon their partnership-outcome variables scores, did not do a good job in assessing partner strengths and weaknesses.

In more successful partnerships, both faculty and community partners indicated that they were able to distance their relationship from the demands of the larger university institution. For example, community partners did not blame faculty for IRB delays or budget issues. The community partner understood that the university is a large institution with bureaucratic issues, and perceived their partnership as successful in spite of these challenges. However, some faculty felt as if they were being personally blamed for the institutional bureaucracy that hindered the partnership from advancing. This supports the survey finding that faculty partners did not perceive that community partners understood the culture of the medical school.

Regarding change to organizational culture, there was an example of one community partner that had difficulty invoicing for funds and eventually quit the partnership. The faculty partner was the interview participant. It was this individual's position that the community partner could not understand the concepts of percentage of effort in terms of personnel, hourly invoicing, and documenting reimbursable items. The community partner became so frustrated by repeated requests to document reimbursements properly that the organization quit the partnership. The faculty partner could not understand why the community agency was not willing to change their invoicing operations to receive a large amount of money. It could be interpreted that the community partner would rather leave money on the table than adjust their operating procedure to appease an institution with which they had no prior relationship.

However, it could also be argued that the institution created an invoicing system that unintentionally discriminated against small, cash-strapped, non-profit organizations. These organizations do not have the resources or capacity to buy on credit or to spend large amounts of cash up front, and then wait for the reimbursement to replenish their coffers.

As can be seen, organizational culture was on the minds of many of the respondents during the interview. Considering this was the first round of funding for this grant program, many partners were still getting familiar with each other. In the bigger picture, the university is still learning how to work with the community, and the community is still learning to work with the university.

Three of the nine community partners that participated in the interview mentioned that there were IRB issues or "hoops to jump through" as one partner stated. One of the community partners interviewed mentioned the fiscal management or payments to the community partners from the university as a source of conflict. Comparatively, five of seven faculty partners sited issues with the IRB, and three of seven mentioned issues related to payments to community partners as a source of conflict in the partnership.

Faculty partners were responsible for submitting IRB protocols and amendments. Their sense of frustration with the IRB may be projected on the partnership as a whole, when in reality it was a conflict between faculty partners and the institution. Several of the interviewees were from the same partnership. In one case, the faculty partner cites significant frustration with the IRB regarding protocol amendments and violation of proto-

cols, while the corresponding community partner states, "Never heard of IRB, not dealing with it." While faculty thought that IRB and invoicing were the major sources of conflict in the partnership, the community partners interviewed offered another source of conflict: time commitment to the project. Five of the nine community partners mentioned that they were not prepared to work on this project as much as it seemed was expected of them, and that there was an imbalance of commitment, with some community partners feeling that they do the bulk of the work. Two of the community partners did not mention any source of conflict.

On the quantitative survey, the wording of the questions and response categories assessing conflict among the partners did not pick up the type or sources of conflict reported in the interviews. With the exception of the one example, where the community partner quit over budget issues, many partnerships did not face major conflict. However, most of the partnerships experienced some levels of frustration. The sources of that frustration differed, with faculty partners frustrated by the administrative processes mandated by the funding source and the institution. Community partners were more frustrated by the large time commitment they felt they must give to the partnership.

Applicability to Social Workers

Understanding the findings of this study and applying them to the education of social workers requires the adaptation of the perspectives of both the university and community. While concepts like trust, respect, and the ability to communicate cannot be taught in any curriculum, communicating with cultural sensitivity is an essential component of practicing social work. Gaining cultural sensitivity can occur through the process of understanding each other's assets and deficits. In a review of the history of a university-community partnership in Chicago, Wiewel, et al. (2000) state that, unlike government agencies or universities, community-based organizations "… typically lack resources and expertise and have considerably less experience in making major strategic decisions, being taken seriously, and having their agenda taken seriously." When a community is viewed as needy and in deficit of skills and resources, the community is viewed as lacking the ability to take care of itself (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). Community leaders, when forced to obtain resources in a deficit-based model, often compete with each other for assistance, creating fragmentation of community. This competition forces leaders to point out each other's weaknesses in public (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993), often through the media. Therefore, the majority of news coming out the community in question is negative, furthering stereotypes and ignoring the assets that communities actually possess. (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993).

This perceived lack of resources or skill can be offset by a rigorous agenda of assessment, understanding both the strengths and weaknesses of the community, and through thorough needs assessment techniques that focus and build on the assets of a community. By demonstrating skill in traditionally academic areas, such as research, perceived community weaknesses can be turned into strengths.

Focused Curricular Offerings

The Council on Social Work Education, as of 2004, listed 637 accredited social work programs at the bachelor's and master's level (Dyeson, 2004). Much has changed since the Council was created in 1952. Recently, the influence of managed health care and complicated patient reimbursement processes has required the social worker to take on greater administrative responsibilities within organizations (MGH, 2004). This issue leads to the following questions: What are schools of social work doing to prepare graduates for the administrative challenges they may face in the working world? What types of continuing education programs are being offered to professionals in the field? And how can the five essential dimensions of partnership be integrated into social work curriculum and community organiza-

tions, increasing the assets of a community? The first step is to look at curricular offerings of social work programs.

Searching the internet for examples of education programs, several BSW, MSW, PhD, and continuing education program curricula were randomly selected. A review of the course offerings was performed to identify educational opportunities focusing on the threshold dimensions (most specifically organizational communication and organizational assessment), organizational/coalition governance, organizational/coalition missions, assessment techniques, and organizational culture. A trend was found, in which assessment/research and community organizational management-related coursework peaked with the MSW degree, and steadily declined through the PhD degree and continuing education programs. In the information given below, no information is given as to which departments or schools of social work are associated with particular offerings.

At the bachelor's level, one program offered a BA of Social Work, with two, of a potential 37 classes focusing on community change and research design. A second program offered three, of a potential 32, classes in this area. Again, a research class was required, along with a class addressing organizations and communities, and another on social programs and policies.

MSW programs saw a sharp increase in the proportion of classes offered in the area of community organization management and assessment/research. On the other hand, this increase in community-based focus is limited to degree concentrations on administrative leadership. In one MSW program, four of 10 required courses addressed policy, research, evaluation and organizational theory. However, their mental health and youth development concentrations offered no upper-level courses in these areas. This program's community concentration included three additional courses, one on administration and management, another on community social work, and an integrative seminar involving the community, bringing the total to seven courses, out of a possible 26.

A similar trend was found in a second MSW program, in which the clinical concentration had two, out of 20, courses focusing on research or community-based issues. The administrative leadership tract in this same program offered eight, out of 20, courses in research or community-based organizational issues.

At the PhD level, one program had four of 14 courses focusing on research methods or community-based organizations, while another showed six of 16 courses in these areas. Of those six courses, four explicitly focused on academic research, one on policy, and the other on administration.

Finally, two continuing social work education programs were assessed. For spring 2008, one university-based Office of Professional Development offered 16 continuing education courses for social workers, with one course focusing on grant writing. Another school of social work's continuing education department offered 17 courses for spring 2008. Two courses related to organizational issues were offered, one on grant writing and one focusing on management and supervision.

The argument could be made that coursework in non-profit management, community and programmatic assessment, organizational cultures, and leadership are not as effective as learning those skills on the job. Yet, as the sample curricula show, unless an MSW student selects the community or administrative tract (and that is not even an option at some smaller programs), the likelihood of being exposed to non-profit management, in-depth research methods, or leadership is small. However, as the desire for fiscal efficiency and evidence-based practices grows, the likelihood of managing an organization or department, participating in community-based research, assessing outcomes, leading public forums or consortiums, and working with university faculty and students remains high, regardless of the individual social worker's MSW tract. Thus, it is imperative that non-profit management, pol-

icy, university-style research methods, and organizational culture and theory be taught at the continuing education level.

Understanding organizational culture, from both community-based and university-based social worker perspectives, will enhance social worker's ability to contribute to partnerships. From the university-based perspective, understanding how community organizations handle IRB situations, the budget realities of non-profit social service organizations, and understanding informed consent issues are areas which will improve relations with non-university organizations.

From the community-based social worker perspective, learning about IRB, developing research methodologies that are exempt from human subjects review, developing partnership missions that provide mutual benefit to university and community partners, and learning to involve community members as partners, and not receivers of service, will allow for improved service provision that is based upon consumer-based need.

The depth of the relationship between university and community partners is dependent on several factors. However, no relationship can exist if it is not based upon trust, respect, and an understanding of strengths and weaknesses. It is from that foundation that a fair and representative governance structure is developed, a mutually beneficial partnership mission is created, and community-based activities are assessed for improvement in the quality of life. Enveloping this process is organizational culture. Whether aware of that culture or not, it influences the professional behavior of social workers. Understanding how your partners perceive that organizational culture is key to creating a successful partnership.

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